

VZCZCXRO4736  
PP RUEHDE RUEHDIR  
DE RUEHDO #0667/01 2611226  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
P 171226Z SEP 08  
FM AMEMBASSY DOHA  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8230  
INFO RUEHZM/GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL COLLECTIVE  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1365

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 DOHA 000667

SIPDIS  
SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [KTIA](#) [QA](#)  
SUBJECT: UN DISABILITIES RATIFICATION REFLECTS QATAR  
COMMITMENT TO DISABLED

-----  
(U) KEY POINTS  
-----

-- On July 12, the Amir signed a decree ratifying the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Local experts maintain that the ratification was a logical step given Qatar's increasing commitment to the rights of the disabled.

-- During the past decade, Qatar has developed a strong institutional framework to provide a wide array of services to those afflicted with physical and mental disabilities.

-- Advocates for the disabled praise the Amiri decree but caution that providing accessible facilities remains a challenge in Qatar. The ratification of the convention is not likely to change this or broaden the legal options available to the disabled, say their advocates.

-----  
(SBU) COMMENTS  
-----

-- The ratification of the UN Convention on Disabilities is consistent with Qatar's increasing attention to human rights overall and the rights of the disabled in particular.

-- The next test will be whether Qatar enforces measures to require greater accessibility in public buildings, in line with the obligations of the Convention.

-- It is doubtful that the Convention will prompt the Qatari authorities to improve accessibility, since powerful business interests will stand in the way. It is even less likely that its ratification will be recognized by the courts as creating substantive rights, beyond Qatari civil law, for the disabled.

END KEY POINTS AND COMMENTS

11. (U) On July 12, Amir Hamad Bin Khalifa Al Thani issued a decree ratifying the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The decree came one year after Qatar became the 100th nation to sign the pact. The ratification was expected, and experts say that it was a logical step in Qatar's commitment to the rights of the disabled.

12. (SBU) Over the past decade, Qatar has developed an impressive institutional infrastructure for providing medical services, physical therapy, and occupational therapy for the disabled:

-- The Shafallah Center for Children with Special Needs: The Center, located in a state of the art facility in Doha,

offers more than 500 children with severe learning disabilities classroom instruction, physical therapy, and vocational training. Children of all nationalities are eligible, although Qatari children are given priority and there is currently a waiting list for non-Qatari children. Hana al-Emadi, Acting Director of Public Relations for the Center, told Poloff that the Center is in the midst of a multi-year expansion. When completed, the Shafallah complex will include a hospital for children with special needs and an athletic complex that will be suitable for hosting the Special Olympic and Paralympic Games.

-- The Al Noor Institute for the Blind: This Institute offers services to more than 800 Qataris with limited or no vision. An on-site clinic provides initial diagnostic services and monitors the condition of Al Noor clients throughout their lives. Staff members develop an individualized plan for each client. The plans differ depending upon the severity of the condition and the age at which the vision loss began. The services of the Al Noor Institute are available to all residents of Qatar, regardless of nationality. Dr. Hayat Khalil Hassan Nazar Heji, Director of Al Noor, told Poloff that she is a member of a special committee on the disabled which meets with and advises the Supreme Council on Family Affairs (Note: The Supreme Council on Family Affairs was established in 1998 under the leadership of Sheikha Mozha bint Nasser Al Misnad, wife of the Amir. It is an advocacy organization active in all areas relevant to the family and is charged with ensuring the enforcement of government regulations mandating accessibility and prohibiting discrimination in the workplace. It has a generally positive record in enforcing anti-discrimination

DOHA 00000667 002 OF 002

measures, but has a poor record in compelling builders to comply with accessibility requirements. End note). She stated that the main priority for Al Noor at this time is making public facilities and transportation more accessible to the blind.

-- The Qatar Society for Rehabilitation and Special Needs: Focuses on the rehabilitation of adults with physical handicaps or severe learning disabilities. Ameer Al Mulla, Executive Manager of the Society, told Poloff that he enjoys a close working relationship with the Supreme Council on Family Affairs, and sits on the same advisory committee as Dr. Heji. He praised the ratification of the UN Convention, but stated that the building codes of Qatar need to provide greater accessibility for the disabled. He expressed doubt that the right laws would be put in place any time soon, given that business interests would rise up against imposed/enforced accessibility requirements.

13. (SBU) One prominent Qatari expert believes that the ratification of the UN pact may lead to substantive rights for Qatari residents that would enable them to bring suit for discrimination and lack of accessibility against employers and owners of public buildings. Najeeb bin Mohammed Al Nauimi, a former Qatari Minister of Justice, stressed to Poloff that although these rights, based on the Convention and application of international law, exist in theory, it would be difficult to translate them into reality. He noted that political and economic interests in Qatar are intertwined and he predicted fierce resistance to any effort to force builders to meet strict accessibility standards. He predicted even fiercer resistance in the judiciary to the recognition of a legal theory that would give Qatari residents the right to sue based upon the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, or any international standard. The former minister added that western builders will slowly begin to comply with recognized standards of accessibility, but only on a voluntary basis. He nonetheless remains optimistic that as Qatar grows and its attitudes change, there will be more accessibility and legal rights for the disabled based upon the newly ratified Convention.

LeBaron